Thematic, Formal, and Ideological Aspects of Literary Fiction: The Rise of Detective Fiction

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Abstract— *From ancient Greece on, fictional narratives have entailed deciphering mystery. At almost the same period as the detective branch of the Metropolitan Police was evolving, the genre of detective fiction was also emerging, mainly in the short-story form. In these stories, a mystery or a crime occurs, and an amateur or professional detective is called in to solve it. The first modern detective story is often thought to be Edgar Allan Poe's The Murders in the Rue Morgue, which first introduced the golden age of detective stories, and the world to private detectives, that would later Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Detective fiction is one of the most popular literary genres. From the rigid structures of classic whodunits to the genre-bending experiments of today, crime fiction has undergone a fascinating evolution that is found in an investigative journey, and the eternal human desire to see justice served.*

Keywords— ***Detective Fiction; Sherlock Holmes; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; Golden Age***

Introduction

From ancient Greece on, fictional narratives have entailed deciphering mystery. Sophocles' Oedipus must solve the mystery of the plague decimating Thebes; the play is a dramatization of how he ultimately "detects" the culprit responsible for the plague, who turns out to be Oedipus himself. The readings of Shakespeare's plays had provided a 'history' that was produced in the sixteenth century that sometimes made little distinction between national and local concerns – the latter often taking the form of anecdotes about local crimes and murders, gossip, and bizarre events (Parvini). In the *Poetics*, Aristotle defines a successful plot as one that has a conflict, which can include, and often does include, a "mystery," that gives rise to a climax, followed by a resolution of the conflict, a plot line that describes the reasons for events happening, including those of every Sherlock Holmes story. This can be seen not only in the plot but also in illustrations (See Figure 1). The traditional elements of the detective story are: (1) the seemingly perfect crime; (2) the wrongly accused suspect at whom circumstantial evidence points; (3) the bungling of dim-witted police; (4) the greater powers of observation and superior mind of the detective; and (5) the startling and

unexpected denouement, in which the detective reveals how the identity of the culprit was found. Sherlock Holmes, along with his loyal, somewhat blunt companion Dr. Watson, made his first appearance in Arthur, later Sir Arthur, Conan Doyle's novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and continued into the 20th century in such collections of stories as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894) and the longer *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). So great was the appeal of Sherlock Holmes's detecting style that the death of Conan Doyle did little to end Holmes's career; several writers, often expanding upon circumstances mentioned in the original works, have attempted to carry on the traditions found in Sherlock Holmes stories.

The 1930s was the golden age of the detective story, with the detectives named above continuing in new novels. The decade was also marked by books that gained widespread attention to the stories of Sherlock Holmes and other characters and marked the beginning of the detective fiction genre.

At almost the same period as the detective branch of the Metropolitan Police was evolving, the genre of detective fiction was also emerging, mainly in the short-story form. In these stories, a mystery or a crime occurs, and

an amateur or professional detective is called in to solve it. The detective reveals the solution only at the end of the narrative when he or she explains how the solution was reached, often through the scientific method—conclusions drawn from material evidence. The settings of detective fiction are usually contemporary with the time written and frequently take place in urban areas (Miskimmin). Detective fiction is a particular genre of mystery writing that is defined by the mystery at the center of the story that is crucially, definitively solved by a particular person known as a detective, either private or police, who uses materials that are based on evidence and uncovers relevant facts, which are essential to a determination of who did the crime and how and why.
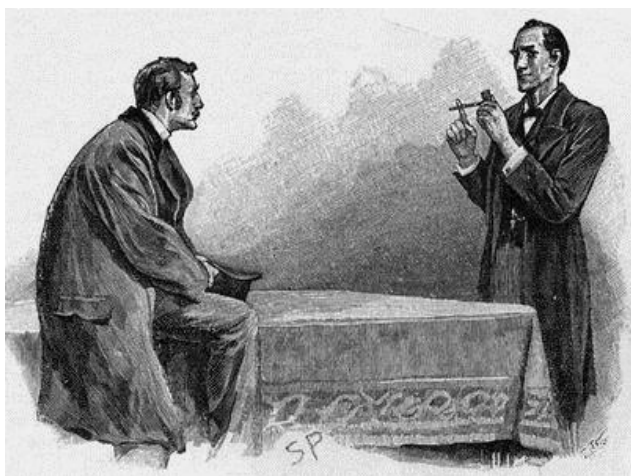

Fig.1: Sherlock Holmes (right) explaining to Dr. Watson what he has deduced from a pipe left behind by a visitor; illustration by Sidney Paget for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Yellow Face," The Strand Magazine*, 1893.*

The form of detective fiction throughout most of the 19th century was the short story published in various periodicals of the period. A few longer detective fiction were published as separate books in the 19th century, but book-length detective fiction, such as that by Agatha Christie, was a product of the 20th century. From the 1890s into the early 20th century, a great amount of new detective fiction appeared in Britain, France, and the United States. The interest and pleasure in reading detective fiction, for the most part, come from discovering the way the detective uncovers the criminal and the criminal's motive, which generally are a surprise to everybody, including the reader. The criminal is usually an individual, not part of a professional crime organization, which can be reassuring to the reader.

The word detective entered the English language in the mid-1800s, but it is ultimately derived from the Latin

word, meaning "to uncover." The label "detective" was not in common usage until there were actual official detectives, which did not happen until the mid-Victorian period. In these stories, a mystery or a crime occurs, and an amateur or professional detective is called in to solve it. The detective reveals the solution only at the end of the narrative when he or she explains how the solution was reached, often through the scientific method—conclusions drawn from material evidence. The settings of detective fiction are usually contemporary with the time written and frequently take place in urban areas.

Detective fiction is one of the most popular literary genres. It is a genre of fiction that can be traced back to the 1800s, around the time of the Industrial Revolution. Before this time, most people lived in smaller towns and worked and socialized in closer circles, so people knew everyone they came into contact with for the most part. However, with the rise of industrial jobs, more people began moving to cities, which led to interacting with more strangers daily, a heightened sense of suspicion and uncertainty, and yes, more crime. It was around this time too where police forces were first established. London's police force came to be in 1829, and New York City got its police force in 1845. With more people living in cities and crime rates on the rise, the setting was right for detective genres to grow.

Detective fiction and the journey of its development to one of the most eminent genres in the present time (Dubey). The first modern detective story is often thought to be Edgar Allan Poe's The Murders in the Rue Morgue, a short story published in 1841 that introduced the world to private detective Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. Detective fiction was so new when Dupin entered the literary world that the word "detective" hadn't even been used in the English language. It was Christie and other authors from the Golden Age of Detective Fiction have created a legacy of detective novels based on gathering clues and solving crimes as if they were puzzles the reader can solve with the detective. In contemporary literature, this style has evolved into what we now call cozy mysteries.

By the 19th century detective fiction was in short-story form, the persistence of the short-story format in the 19th century was due in part to the influence of Poe's Dupin 1840s detective short stories, but also it was easier to sustain suspense in a short story than a book-length narrative, where the story was to break the narrative into two parts. Detective fiction, which came into the literary scene in the second half of the Victorian Age, found its first prominent cues in the novels of Wilkie Collins (Dubey). In the first part, the detective solves the crime but points to the wrong perpetrator; the second part takes place years later when the case is taken up again and the right criminal is finally

discovered. This became an effective method of expanding the story to book length could not be generally used, so later authors of novel-length detective stories introduced more characters and various red herrings, that is, plot lines that lead to incorrect conclusions.

Beginning Works of Detective Fiction

It was the persistence of the short-story format in the 19th century that was due in part to the influence of detective short stories in the 1840s that made it easier to sustain suspense in a short story than in a book-length narrative. The very popular *Trent's Last Case*, by E. C. Bentley (1913), has traditionally been seen as one of the first novel-length detective fiction. Bentley's method of stretching out the story was to break the narrative into two parts—in the first part the detective solves the crime but points to the wrong perpetrator; the second part takes place years later when the case is taken up again and the right criminal is finally discovered. This method of expanding the story to book length could not be generally used, so later authors of novel-length detective stories introduced more characters and various red herrings, that is, plot lines that lead to incorrect conclusions. There was an interest and pleasure in reading detective fiction, for the most part, comes from discovering the way the detective uncovers the criminal and the criminal's motive, which generally are a surprise to everybody, including the reader. The criminal is usually an individual, not part of a professional crime organization, which can be reassuring to the reader. The usually idiosyncratic personality of the detective as well as his or her inevitable success in solving the crime are other pleasures for the readers, which keep them coming back for more adventures of the specific detective, whether Sherlock Holmes or, later, Miss Marple or Lord Peter Wimsey (Mossman). However, another characteristic of most detective fiction is that the detective goes on to solve other crimes in other stories, making the series an important part of the creation of the character of the detective and the popularity of the genre.

British detective fiction writers in the latter half of the 19th century involve a brilliant and eccentric, usually private detective who consistently shows the incompetence of the official police force by his astonishing observational skills and his ability to collect material information others overlook; to note all possible solutions, discarding those that are not relevant; and to put together at the end a perfect, unchallengeable sequence of events that points to the criminal and how and why he or she committed the crime, whether it was killing a woman and stuffing her up the chimney or hiding an incriminating letter. It was between the publication of Bleak House (1853) and The Moonstone (1868) that another semi-fictional policeman published his

memoirs he began publishing the stories in Chambers's Edinburgh Journal and in some American magazines, but in 1856, they were collected into a volume in England, giving way to the stories of Sherlock Holmes.

Sherlock Holmes Stories: 1864–1887

During the several decades between the Dupin stories of the 1840s and the Sherlock Holmes stories of the late 1880s and 1890s, a growing number of detective stories were published. A few established novelists, like Dickens, Collins, Braddon, Sheridan Le Fanu, and Mrs. Henry Wood, wrote stories of mystery and detection, some of which featured a detective but usually an amateur one involved only in a single case. Several detective stories that fit the generic form were published in the United States and France as well. In the United States, in which characters were introduced using an identity that involved a secret life as a detective.

In the years following, Conan Doyle's Holmes had arguably the most interesting development in British detective fiction was the introduction of the woman detective, long before any women were, in fact, part of the detective branch of the Metropolitan Police. Many of these stories involved a mystery that featured a detective who was another occupation such as an insurance investigator who suspects a baron of murdering his wife, on whom he had taken out five insurance policies. Or an investigation where the investigator uncovers several murders, but the real interest in the novel finds itself to be how the murders were committed and then how to catch the baron, who appears to have committed a perfect crime. Literature in the period before the Sherlock Holmes stories appeared were novel-length stories.

Sherlock Holmes: 1887–1926

The history of detective fiction in 19th-century Britain finally arrives at 221B Baker Street, where Sherlock Holmes lives with his sidekick, Dr. John Watson, the narrator of the Holmes stories. Holmes is the creation of fifty-six stories and four short novels by an unsuccessful doctor, Arthur Conan Doyle, who only at the very end of his life (he died in 1930) grudgingly accepted that his character Holmes and his stories had any value. Famously, he tried to kill Holmes off after twenty-three stories but was forced by popular demand to resurrect him in thirty-three more stories and two novellas.

The story of how Arthur Conan Doyle developed the character of Holmes has been told many times. Conan Doyle trained as a doctor at Edinburgh University and received a medical degree in 1881, but he did not have a lot of success as a doctor, and he took to writing partly as a pastime but also in the hope of supplementing his income. The first Holmes story was a novella, A Study in Scarlet,

published in Beeton's Christmas Annual (1887), which was followed in 1890 by another novella, The Sign of the Four, first published in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine (Rzepka). From the beginning, the character of Sherlock Holmes is a contradictory mixture of a man with amazingly unemotional scientific rationality, who also is a dreamy romantic violinist and drug taker. In this, he differs from his predecessor Auguste Dupin, who is wholly the rational man, which is the image that Holmes also projects to the clients and the police. But to Watson and the reader, he shows his other side as a man susceptible to boredom and at times emotionally reactive to his clients. Holmes is presented as a misogynist, but, in a contradiction, he keeps the photograph of Irene Adler, who bested him in the very first Holmes short story "A Scandal in Bohemia" and, as Watson tells the reader, was always "the Woman" to Holmes. Holmes's insistence on rationality and denial of emotion makes him at times seem cold, but his enthusiasm, his love of disguises, his single-mindedness, and his amusing patches of ignorance do charm the reader.

Though other contributing sources for the character of Sherlock Holmes there is general agreement that Holmes is, in large part, based on one of Conan Doyle's teachers in Edinburgh, Dr. Joseph Bell. Bell was well known at the medical school for diagnosing patients in the waiting room of the infirmary without speaking to them, a practice that Holmes uses frequently with his clients, as in "The Norwood Builder," (Van Dine): "You mentioned your name as if I should recognize it, but I assure you that, beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you." It was in the first two novellas, that Conan Doyle had not quite mastered the form that would mark his most famous stories.

In the first of the Holmes tales, a third of the novella is taken up with a story about the Mormons in the United States in which Holmes does not appear. The second has a very convoluted plot involving the East India Company, the Indian 1857 uprising, stolen treasure, convicts, and corrupt prison guards. The structure of the Sherlock Holmes tales. There is a story that involves a mystery that intrigues Holmes's interest. That story inspires Holmes's detective work involving close observation and scientific thinking through which Holmes arrives at the solution. This solution is sometimes tested when Holmes sets up a trap for the perpetrator, and only at that point, at the very end of the piece, does Holmes tell the story of his observations and sometimes the scientific knowledge, that would lead him to uncover the true story of the crime, who did it, and how and why.

The first twelve short stories were published as a volume, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes in 1892; the next eleven6 stories were brought together in 1894 in The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes, with the concluding story "The Final Problem" ending the volume. Many critics believe these twenty-three stories are the best of the fifty-six Holmes stories. Holmes wrote a novella set before Holmes's supposed death, The Hound of the Baskervilles, in 1901–1902, but when the swell of demand forced him to resurrect Holmes from the dead in 1903, he did so with twenty-five new stories collected in two additional books, The Return of Sherlock Holmes (1905) and The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes (1927). All the stories collected in these last two volumes originally appeared in the Strand Magazine between 1903 and 1927. Two more volumes of Holmes stories were published—the last of the four Holmes novels, The Valley of Fear (1914), and His Last Bow (1917), a collection of mainly previously published stories. However, not all of the cases brought to Holmes involve murder. There were some planned murders that Holmes did stop before they happened. This was done by uncovering the reasons for mysterious behaviors and inexplicable happenings. The crimes his clients bring to him, though, are often threats, mysterious events, and secrets in middle-class and sometimes aristocratic families. The motive is usually money, sometimes linked with some action or crime in the past, and sometimes in various locations of the empire. Occasionally the problem presented to Holmes by the client is not the real crime. Though Conan Doyle's first two novellas were only moderately successful, the Holmes stories were almost instantaneously popular. The responses, analyses, critiques, continuations, and adaptations of Sherlock Holmes and the stories of his career as a consulting detective number in the thousands.

Perhaps the most influential of the early adaptations and continuations was the play Sherlock Holmes, which grew out of a five-act play written by Conan Doyle and significantly rewritten by William Gillette. This play was first produced in New York in 1899 and then in London in 1901 (Ousby). Though the illustrator of the Holmes stories in the Strand, Sidney Paget, has Holmes smoking a straight-stemmed pipe, Gillette's play established the curved calabash pipe (See Figure 2) as part of the enduring image of Holmes. Many characters were found to always wear a deerstalker hat or carry a magnifying glass, which was central in Sherlock Holmes. Since this early expansion of the Holmes stories at the end of the 19th century, there have been many more plays, motion pictures, television series, and novels featuring Holmes.

Fig.2: Sidney Paget's illustration of Sherlock Holmes with a straight pipe from "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891). Wikimedia Commons.

Many explanations of the long-lasting popularity of the Sherlock Holmes figure and the detective stories that define him have been offered. One is that the stories recreate the entire 19th-century world before modern technology changed it, a world lost and suffused with nostalgia: the London fog, the gaslights, the hansom cabs, the interplay between the urban setting and the suburban and country estates where many of the crimes take place; the class differences and their markers so neatly observed by Holmes, who draws the exactly right conclusion about them.

Another theory that was expressed was to take detective fiction seriously, saying that classical detectives like Holmes reassure us that crime is an individual affair, and the detective will always discover the culprit. Further, the story "enable[s] us to entertain some very powerful latent feelings generated by the repressiveness of the family circle by treating in fantasy a domestic murder but in such a way as to negate any feelings of implication or guilt on the part of the reader" (Dover and Van). Some think that the popularity of detective fiction, in general, is because of the seemingly superhuman intelligence and skill of the classic detective and the inevitability that the crime will be solved by him or her, the criminal caught, and the social order restored, reassure us that our anxieties about social disorder, evil, violence, and crime will be mitigated (Porter). The

detective always solves the crime, though Holmes admits to Watson he has failed in some cases, but these failures are never written up by Watson.

These explanations apply to almost all detective fiction. For the continuing appeal of the Sherlock Holmes stories specifically, the character of Holmes himself, as created by Conan Doyle, must be part of the explanation for their endurance. His quirks, his eagerness, his tricks and devices, his energies, his philosophy, and his turn to the violin charm us all. We want to be in his presence over and over again, and since the actual stories are limited in number, we turn to sequels, prequels, movies, television, graphic novels, and adaptations of all sorts of Sherlock Holmes.

British Detective Fiction after Sherlock Holmes: 1893–1914

The supposed death of Sherlock Holmes in 1893 coincides with another expansion of British detective fiction. New fictional detectives appeared regularly in the magazines from 1893 to 1914; there was, understandably, less publication of the genre during World War I, though there was some. In the United States, a new type of detective fiction, known as the "hard-boiled school" of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, moved away from the British model. The period between 1893 and 1914 is a kind of interregnum in the development of detective fiction in Britain. Thus this period is a convenient marker of the end of the development of 19th-century detective fiction in Britain.

It was when Conan Doyle decided to kill Sherlock Holmes and ended the series, the editors looked to find a substitute for the popular series. They found Arthur Morrison, who is known now mainly for novels about London poverty. His detective was Martin Hewitt, whose first case, "The Lenton Croft Robberies," a locked-room mystery, appeared in the Strand in March 1894, three months after Holmes's supposed demise in "The Final Problem" in December 1893. Morrison's detective Hewitt, in his ordinariness if not in his detecting abilities, is almost the exact opposite of Holmes. He started as an insurance investigator but turned to hiring himself as a private detective. He is placid, even plodding, though he uses the same techniques of close observation, logical reasoning, and forensic data as Holmes does. Unlike Holmes, however, Hewitt is genial accommodating, and on good terms with the police. Rather than the cozy bachelor quarters of Holmes and Watson, Hewitt's office is described in his first case as located in a dingy office building.

Martin Hewitt lives alone, but as in the Holmes stories, the narrator, a journalist friend named Brett, recounts the cases; unlike Watson, Brett is not always "on

the case," nor is his relationship with the detective as close as that of Holmes and Watson. Some of the cases Brett reports he constructs from Hewitt's detailing of the facts to him. Like those of Holmes, most of Hewitt's cases involve crimes against the middle and professional classes: theft, fraud, inheritance issues, wrongful charges, and so forth. In a few cases, as an independent operator, Hewitt does not report the solution of the crime to the authorities, preferring justice to the law and setting the tone for several themes to emerge in Detective Fiction.

Themes of Detective Fiction

Crime fiction has captivated readers for centuries. From the gritty streets of noir to the elegant drawing rooms of classic mysteries, these stories explore the darker side of human nature. However, some elements are not just checkboxes on a plot outline; they are the lifeblood of engaging storytelling. It is by weaving together means, motive, and opportunity, that detective fiction creates a narrative that is rich with suspense and complexity. The following list provides an overview of frequent features and addresses thematic, formal, and ideological aspects:

▪ Detectives and detection: an obvious starting point included in almost all definitions is the presence of a detective character, professional or amateur. This figure is centrally involved in a plot, which "describe[s] the effects of detection."

▪ Crime and investigation: thematically, detective action plots are characterized by an "interest in the nature of, motives for, and results of, a crime," which are then explored in an investigation.

▪ Documents and documentation: in terms of content, another reoccurring topic in detective action is a concern with written documents and their role in conveying and preserving knowledge. Especially early detective stories show a heightened interest in practices of recording and the documentation of knowledge.

▪ The power of reason: the detective most frequently relies on reason and rationality when solving problems. Such reliance often expresses itself in an affinity for or references to scientific procedures, which are conceptually tied to ideas of objectivity.

▪ Containing disorder: regardless of specific themes or plot points, detective stories tend to engage in empowering fantasies of controlling and containing disorder and disruption. Such control is frequently achieved through the power of reason, but can also arise from the detective's physical prowess. This tendency to contain disorder is also rejected in how the genre makes use of lists.

▪ Clue puzzles: a feature that is strongly indicative of detective action and typically found in the subgenre of Golden Age clue puzzles is the presence of textual clues that hint toward the central mystery throughout the novel. These clues can be spotted and pieced together by the reader to solve the puzzle on their own.

▪ Reader participation: a rarely discussed, but frequent feature of detective action is that it encourages "reader participation." There is a similar phenomenon that uses the competitive nature of detective action that often involves the level of the reader, for example, by encouraging readers to piece together the clues before the fictional detective does.

None of these features can be considered genre-defining on its own, but together, they form a pattern that can be recognized because it has been internalized by readers. Recent studies have employed such pattern recognition on an empirical level and used computer-based, statistical models to establish patterns of coherence within a group of texts considered to belong to the same genre. Ted Underwood, for example, identifies a pattern in detective fiction that is "textually coherent across a period of 160 years (1829–1989)." Underwood's pattern is consistent across subgenres from the clue puzzle to hardboiled action that at first glance seem to differ widely in theme and plot mechanics, while at the same time, it proves limited sensation action, which is generally considered to be closely related to detective action. The idea of pattern recognition also forges a strong conceptual link between the form of the list and the genre of detective action. Lists become a tool for both detectives and readers that enables them to recognize patterns and to (re-)order information. This book's underlying assumption that detective action uses lists as formal devices to represent ideas about order is rooted in the genre's history.

Starting in the 19-century, a good number of stories came from the development of British detective fiction, especially those in the early 20th century, provide an analysis of the detectives in two canonized novels that appeared around the time of the establishment of the detective branch of the Metropolitan Police, the well-known novels *Bleak House*, by Charles Dickens (1853), whose police detective is Inspector Bucket, and *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins (1868), whose police detective is Sergeant Cuff. However, these classic novels are not centrally constructed around the detective's work, nor do they culminate in the detective's revelation of both the criminal who did the crime and how and why he or she did it. Nonetheless, many early critical studies of Victorian detective fiction discuss only Dickens's Bucket, which was partially based on a real detective, and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Coupled with feminist-inspired efforts to

recover forgotten works by 19th-century women writers, the critical interest in detective fiction led to the discovery of many forgotten detective fiction writers between the 1840s and World War I. Finally, starting in the second half of the 20th century, critical attention tried to account for the popularity of the genre, using Freudian, Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial critiques.

British detective fiction from 1840 to 1914 traces an arc of development from a few precursors to detective stories and on through a variety of authors and detectives in the second half of the 19th century to the 1890s and Sherlock Holmes, arguably the best-known fictional detective in the world. Contemporaneous with the Sherlock Holmes stories and frequently influenced by them are an increasing variety of male and female detectives, including, for example, insurance investigators, educated women, doctors, and even a Catholic priest. After World War I, a new arc of development begins with Agatha Christie and the Golden Age of Detective. These stories helped to redefine both gender and the type of materials that would be used in Detective fiction, otherwise known as a Golden Age for authors.

The Golden Age

The Golden Age period allowed for the novel superseded the short story as a prevalent medium and publishing channel for detective action. Changing reading habits after WWI may also have been responsible for the increasing popularity of novels. Such shifts in popular taste, Julian Symons argues, also influenced the audience the detective action genre drew. Besides an increasing female readership, the genre also saw a rise in female writers during the Golden Age, so that, in this period, detective novels were written increasingly by and for women.

With such shifts in publication form and audience, the themes dealt with in these kinds of stories changed as well: in Agatha Christie's crime stories, for example, "hard work, activity, professionalism and the positivistic mysteries of contemporary forensic science […] are all thrown out together" and replaced by "peaceful reflection." This not only makes detection more accessible to the general public but also caters to the "illusion of effective self-help and self-sufficiency" propagated in the post-WWI period.

Crimes that were covered in these texts, there is a clear shift from the non-violent offenses, such as theft, and concealed identities that characterize the early Holmes stories to murder. Yet, Golden Age murderers are rarely to never professional criminals and usually come from the same social (middle to upper class) circle as the victim, and they have personal rather than professional motives for crimes (Knight). The crime typically takes place in an enclosed setting that allows for a limited number of suspects, and as a general rule, the setting disregards the real-world historical context of the Depression, trade unions, and other political developments. Both writers and readers of such clue puzzles took the notion of fair play, which states that important clues must be made accessible to the reader and thus provide them with a fair chance of detecting the guilty party, very seriously.

For Golden Age authors, where some American writers began to examine and reconsider the formula for detective fiction. Many people started to think of puzzle-solving crime fiction as too unrealistic and too clean. These authors and their readers were looking for crime novels that were more based on reality and the way real crimes happen. And so the hardboiled detective genre was born. These stories included detectives who were dealing with corrupt cops and organized crime. Hardboiled crime novels create a world where it's every man for himself, and the detective can trust no one. While detective fiction emerged as early as the 1920s, the detective genre took off in America in the 1930s-1950s. One of the most popular hardboiled detective novels from this period is Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep, the novel that introduced readers to the detective Philip Marlowe. This character would go on to feature in many of Chandler's short stories and novels. And you'll find many film adaptations featuring this hardboiled detective as well. Today, fictional detectives are often found in contemporary crime fiction. Mystery and suspense fiction is more popular than ever before.

The Golden Age produced a plethora of such rule catalogs and investigations of the underlying principles and building blocks of the genre. Since those genre rules frequently appeared in or heavily relied on the form of the list as their mode of presentation, the remainder of this chapter will take a closer look at three such rule catalogs and elaborate on this curious connection to list-like structures that seems to be written into the detective action genre.

Detective Literature in Academia and Beyond

During the 19th century, some detective stories may have been mentioned or even discussed in the periodical press, especially to take account of the popularity of the genre. However, for the most part, serious critical attention to detective fiction in general and 19th-century detective stories in particular was a 20th-century phenomenon. Some authors of detective fiction and a few literary critics began to write about the genre as a genre in the early decades of the 20th century. The authors of these articles and books generally drew their examples from all of detective fiction—19th century, 20th century, British, American, and French.

Starting after World War II, where attention had been turned to the genre with several important studies. In the second half of the 20th century and under the pressures of feminism and the academic interest in the role of popular literature in culture, an expansion of writing about and publishing of 19th-century British detective fiction resulted. In particular, there was a "recovery" of some lesser-known or even unknown texts that featured 19th-century detectives, especially women detectives. It wasn't until the beginning of the 1960s did universities as part of the "theoretical turn," as it is called in literary studies, emerged many theoretically governed analyses of detective fiction such as Freudian, Marxist, and feminist readings. Some later analyses considered the role of Britain's late-century empire-building in detective fiction, which was coming to its full flowering in the 1890s at the same time as the empire became central to the nation. All these approaches to detective fiction proliferated in the 21st century, particularly the postcolonial lens.

The early critical studies of detective fiction were often written by authors of detective fiction. The very first, as already mentioned, was in 1913, The Technique of the Mystery Story, by Carolyn Wells. After the hiatus of the war and the flourishing of the golden age in the 1920s, another book-length study was Masters of Mystery: A Study of the Detective Story, by H. Douglas Thomson (1931). A more comprehensive survey was a collection of essays by different writers and critics edited by Howard Haycraft in 1941, Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story. In 1946, Haycraft brought out The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays with contributions by fifty-three critics and detective story writers. This collection contains most of the serious work on the genre before World War II.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the critical attention increased again, this time in universities, which became regarded by some as the best introductory material to study the genre. In 1980 a collection of critical essays edited by Robin Winks, Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays, brought together some of the more well-known commentaries on the genre (Berg). By the 19th century, texts discussed in these surveys were those of Conan Doyle, as well as Dickens and Collins. Most often 19th-century British detective fiction was only one part of the mid-20th-century detective studies, and the focus is almost always on Conan Doyle, such as the important 1976 study of the structures, themes, and consequences of popular culture, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, by John G. Cawelti, has two of nine chapters on the classical detective story, but the only 19th-century texts used in the analyses are those of Conan Doyle. Another important work, Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction, by Stephen Knight (1980), also limited the

examples from the 19th century to Holmes. This began to change in the 1970s as the work of recovering so-called forgotten 19th-century detectives began with stories such as Sherlock Holmes.

Theory and Sherlock Holmes

One of the most influential theoretical books on detective fiction published in the 1980s was The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory, edited by Glenn Most and William S. Stowe (1983), which contained studies by most of the important post–World War II literary theorists, some whom used the Sherlock Holmes stories as the exemplars of their theoretical approaches. Using the Holmes stories, many authors developed a concept of "abduction," that is, a method of coming to conclusions that is neither "deduction," which started with an accepted premise and looking for evidence to support it and a conclusion from observed information. Abduction, which they argue is the mental process Holmes uses, is a process of arriving at the most likely but not necessarily the absolute conclusion that can be drawn from an observation.

The role of science in 19th-century detective fiction is frequently referred to but was never really analyzed in an important area of study that is found in the rise and study of the role of the British Empire and the culture of the late decades of the 19th century into the 20th century. However, by the end of the 20th century, the place of detective fiction in the literary canon was well established, the role of women in its development was revealed, and its usefulness for theoretical investigation was secured. Many bibliographies, companions, reference works, and anthologies have continued to be published. The importance of detective fiction in general and 19th-century detective fiction in particular, is, as Sherlock Holmes may have said, "elementary." This gave way to the detective genre which has had a long and illustrious history in British literature. Authors from across the centuries created iconic characters and contributed to the evolution of the genre. From the earliest examples of detective novels to contemporary crime thrillers, British literature has consistently produced some of the most memorable and beloved detectives in literary history.

In the vast landscape of literature, few genres have captivated readers as consistently and intensely as crime fiction. However, what makes this genre so enduringly popular, and how has it evolved has much to do with the ability to dissect the anatomy of crime fiction and to compare the traditional structures that defined the classics with the innovative techniques that have shaped its modern narratives.

The Foundations of Crime Fiction

The roots of crime fiction stretch back to the 19th century, with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) often cited as the first detective story. However, it was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series, beginning with "A Study in Scarlet" (1887), which popularized the genre. These early works established the core elements that would define classic crime novels for decades to come. These elements can be found in the following ways:

Central Detective Protagonist

▪ Uses keen intellect and observation skills to solve crimes from stories such as Sherlock Holmes;
▪ Often has a unique set of skills or expertise that aids in the investigation, such as forensic expertise, knowledge of psychology;
▪ May have a personal stake in the case, driving their determination to solve it; and
▪ Typically has a distinct personality, mannerisms, and habits that shape their approach to the investigation.

Mysterious Crime

▪ Often a murder, but can be any type of crime, such as theft, kidnapping, and arson;
▪ Catalyzes the story, setting the investigation in motion;
▪ Typically has an air of intrigue, with unusual or unexplained circumstances; and
▪ May involve a complex web of motives, alibis, and suspects.

Suspenseful Plot Structure

▪ Carefully reveals information to keep readers guessing until the final reveal;
▪ Uses red herrings and false leads to maintain tension and uncertainty;
▪ Could involve a series of clues and misdirection to keep the reader engaged; and
▪ Often builds towards a climactic moment where the truth is revealed.

Dramatic Reveal of the Culprit

▪ Often happens in a gathering of all suspects, such as in Agatha Christie's "Murder on the Orient Express;"
▪ Typically involves a dramatic and unexpected twist, revealing the true identity of the perpetrator;
▪ May involve a series of revelations, with each new piece of information shedding light on the crime; and
▪ Often has a profound impact on the characters and the story, changing the direction of the narrative.

Common Tropes and Archetypes

▪ Locked-room mystery: A seemingly impossible crime scene challenges readers;
▪ Femme fatale: A seductive woman who lures the protagonist into danger, such as Raymond Chandler's hardboiled detective novels;
▪ Hard-boiled detective: A tough, cynical, and world-weary detective who navigates the dark underbelly of the city;
▪ Amateur sleuth: A non-professional who becomes involved in the investigation, often through personal connection to the crime; and
▪ Police procedural: A detailed and realistic portrayal of police work, often focusing on the investigative process and forensic evidence.

The Evolving Structure of Crime Novels

As society changed, so did the crime fiction genre. Writers began challenging and reinventing traditional structures, introducing innovative storytelling techniques that reflected shifting cultural attitudes and literary trends. One significant departure is the use of nonlinear narratives. Instead of following a straight chronological path, modern crime novels often jump between timeframes, revealing information out of sequence. Gillian Flynn's "Gone Girl" (2012) masterfully employs this technique, alternating between past and present perspectives to gradually uncover its shocking twists. Another innovation is the unreliable narrator. In traditional crime fiction, the narrator—often the detective—is a trustworthy guide. However, contemporary authors play with this expectation. In Paula Hawkins's "The Girl on the Train" (2015), the protagonist's alcoholism and memory gaps cast doubt on her perceptions, leaving readers unsure of what to believe.

Modern crime fiction frequently blends genres, creating hybrid forms that defy easy categorization. Police procedurals of series that describe the day-to-day realities of law enforcement. Meanwhile, psychological thrillers such as "The Silence of the Lambs" went into the criminal mind, and focused more on the "why" than the "who." It is character development that has also evolved in Detective Fiction. This is where classic detectives were often defined by their intellect alone, contemporary protagonists are more complex. They grapple with personal demons, making mistakes and facing moral dilemmas. For instance, in Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad series, detectives' past traumas profoundly influence their current cases. Today's authors frequently subvert classic tropes and reader expectations. In Sophie Hannah's continuation of Agatha Christie's Poirot series, she maintains the familiar setting but introduces darker themes and psychological depth not found in the originals. Similarly, contemporary writers

often challenge the notion that every mystery has a tidy resolution, reflecting a more uncertain world.

Distinguishing Past and Present Crime Fiction

While core elements like a central crime and an investigation persist, several key differences distinguish past and present crime narratives. These changes reflect broader shifts in storytelling techniques, societal concerns, and technological advancements. One notable shift is in the narrative perspective. Classic crime novels typically use third-person omniscient or a detective's first-person view. In contrast, many modern works adopt multiple perspectives or unexpected viewpoints that use narration from the criminals' perspective, turning the traditional structure on its head.

Crime fiction has always mirrored societal concerns, but the specific issues have changed. Golden Age mysteries often dealt with class dynamics in British society.

Technological advancements have dramatically impacted how investigations unfold in crime novels. In classic stories, detectives relied heavily on physical evidence and witness testimonies. Now, authors must account for DNA analysis, digital surveillance, and cyber forensics. Moreover, contemporary crime fiction places a greater emphasis on complex themes and moral dilemmas. Classical works often presented a clear-cut battle between good, the detective, and evil, the criminal. Detective Fiction authors use protagonists who sometimes compromise their principles or find themselves sympathizing with those they pursue.

From the rigid structures of classic whodunits to the genre-bending experiments of today, crime fiction has undergone a fascinating evolution. Yet, throughout these changes, certain elements remain constant: a mysterious crime, an investigative journey, and the eternal human desire to see justice served. The genre can adapt its core components—reworking traditional tropes, embracing new narrative techniques, and reflecting contemporary concerns—which has ensured its continued relevance. Whether set in the past or present, crime novels offer more than mere entertainment. They provide a lens through which we can examine our society, our values, and the complexities of human nature that often masterfully contrasts modern detective stories with classical approaches, delving into moral relativism and ambiguity, which is a hallmark of contemporary crime fiction or Detective Fiction.

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